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ABSTRACT

In 1989, a survey was conducted at Catonsville Community College to establish a consensus about the underlying philosophy governing the college's grading policy. The survey respondents included 167 full-time or adjunct faculty members, 15 student personnel professionals, 8 administrators, and 6 library, media, or telecommunications professionals. Study findings included the following: (1) more than 75% of the respondents agreed that grading practices should reflect the student's skill and knowledge attainment and differentiate between levels of competence attained; that grades are a means of enforcing standards; that grades should be based on a standard established by the teacher and made known to the student in advance; that grades provide a reward system for the student who accomplishes course objectives; that grades should be criterion referenced, and reflect the quality of work done and the level of responsibility accepted by the student; and that grades given in courses taught by several faculty should be reviewed periodically for consistency; (2) there was clear disagreement with statements that grades destroy student motivation, that a failing grade serves only as punishment, that grading creates damaging anxiety, and that grading should be curved; and (3) opinions were split or a large number of respondents had no opinion regarding the subjective/judgmental nature of grades, and the extent to which grades should reflect student motivation, attendance, and attitudes. A comparison of responses by instructional area and respondent group, the survey instrument, and responses to open-ended questions are included. (JMC)

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GRADING PHILOSOPHY SURVEY

FALL, 1989

Catonsville Community College
Office of Institutional Research

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JC 890 462

Grading Philosophy Survey, Fall 1989
Catonsville Community College

During the 1987-88 and 1988-89 academic years, the College Senate reviewed the existing grading policy, each time reaching an impasse with the reports sent back to committee. In an attempt to establish consensus about underlying philosophy governing the College's grading policy, a survey was done in the fall of 1989 of all full-time professionals (constituents of the Senate) and all adjunct teaching faculty. One hundred ninety-eight people responded to a survey which was aimed at identifying opinions and ideology contributing to the faculty's notions about determining final course grades.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Of the 198 respondents, 167 (85%) were teaching faculty, 15 (8%) were from Student Personnel Services, 6 (3%) were from the LMTC, and 8 (4%) were administrators. The instructors were spread throughout the teaching units of the College:

	# of respondents
Technical Studies	25
Business, Social Sciences, Human Services	37
Humanities, Communications, English	40
Mathematics, Science, Engineering	30
Nursing, Physical Education, Health, Leisure Studies	17
Carroll County	11

Fifty-five percent teach transfer/liberal arts courses, and 45% teach career/technical courses. Most (82%) are full-time employees and 18% are part-time. Years of teaching ranged from 1 to 34:

	# of respondents
1 - 5	40
6 - 10	19
11 - 15	31
16 - 20	53
21 +	37

RESULTS

The attached tables give the responses to each of the statements. It is clear that agreement dominated (more than 75% said, "Agree" or "Strongly agree") for the following statements:

1. **Grading practices should reflect the student's skill attainment differentiating between levels of competence attained.**

2. **Grading practices should reflect the student's knowledge**

attainment.

3. Grades are a means of maintaining or enforcing standards.
7. Grades should be based on a standard established by the teacher and made known to the student in advance.
12. Grades provide a reward system for the student who accomplishes the course objectives.
14. Grades should be criterion referenced as opposed to norm referenced, i.e., based on established criteria rather than on how other students in the class perform.
15. Grades should reflect the quality of work done by the student.
16. Grades should reflect the level of responsibility accepted by the student for work required in the class.
17. Course grades should be based on grades received for activities required by the teacher in the class during the semester.
18. Grades provide motivation for students.
23. Grades reflect the student's skill/content mastery.
24. Grades provide a measure of accountability for the student.
30. Grading systems impact student motivation.
33. Faculty should work with others in their discipline to ensure that expectations are comparable.
34. Faculty should work with others in their discipline to ensure that grading standards are similar.
43. Grades given in courses taught by several faculty should periodically be reviewed for consistency.

Disagreement with the following was clear:

4. Grades destroy student motivation.
5. A failing grade serves only as punishment.
8. Grading creates damaging anxiety.
35. Grading for each class should be curved.
38. Once students attend one course period they should get a permanent grade (no drops, no withdrawals).
39. Mid-term grades force teachers to start measuring student performance earlier than necessary.

Opinions were split or there was a large number of respondents who chose to voice no opinion for these statements:

6. Any form of evaluation is by definition subjective and judgmental.
9. Grades mainly measure performance.
10. Class attendance should count as part of a grading system.
11. Student attitude and commitment to the class should directly affect the student's grade.
13. Grades should reflect the student's motivation.
19. Grades are the primary means of conveying information to the student about the student's work in a course.
20. Grades are the primary means of conveying information to

others about a student's work in a course.

21. Success and failure are relative based on the student's frame of reference.
22. Grading throughout the course should be used to affect subsequent student performance in the course.
25. Grades should be cumulative.
26. QPA should be based on credits earned.
27. QPA should be based on credits carried.
28. Major graded activities should be open-ended, e.g., essays, problem solving tests.
29. It is appropriate for course grades to reflect student progress rather than skill level attained.
31. Criteria for grades should be determined by the individual faculty member and his/her standards.
32. Faculty should determine grading criteria in consultation with others in that discipline.
36. Students who do not take action officially to drop a course by a specified time and do not successfully complete course objectives should receive a permanent grade of failure.
37. Students who do not take action officially to drop a course by a specified time and do not successfully complete course objectives should receive a permanent grade of no credit.
40. Mid-term grades provide needed information on progress to the student.
41. Graded activities using open-ended formats (essays, problems, papers) attempt to measure higher level skills.
42. Graded activities using multiple choice, short answer, and true/false formats provide for less subjectivity in grading and are more reflective of student knowledge.
44. Nonpunitive grading encourages laxness in pursuit of grades of C or better.
45. Nonpunitive grading relieves the stigma of failure.
46. Nonpunitive grading encourages students to return and try again after a failing attempt.
47. The College should not spend public resources to support students who demonstrate inability to complete college courses successfully.

Analysis of different groups of respondents proved interesting. Those teaching liberal arts/transfer courses agreed significantly more strongly with than did those teaching career/technical courses:

1. Grading practices should reflect the student's skill attainment differentiating between levels of competence attained.
41. Graded activities using open-ended formats (essays, problems, papers) attempt to measure higher level skills.

44. Nonpunitive grading encourages laxness in pursuit of grades of C or better.

Those teaching in the career areas agreed more strongly with:

13. Grades should reflect the student's motivation.
42. Graded activities using multiple choice, short answer, and true/false formats provide for less subjectivity in grading and are more reflective of student knowledge.
43. Grades given in courses taught by several faculty should periodically be reviewed for consistency.
47. The College should not spend public resources to support students who demonstrate inability to complete college courses successfully.

When responses from the various teaching divisions recognized by the Senate were examined for significant differences, some appeared. Responses to statement 2 (Grading practices should reflect the student's knowledge attainment) exhibited significantly more agreement from BSSHS, MSE, and NPEHLS. Responses to statement 15 (Grades should reflect the quality of work done by the student) exhibited significantly more agreement from BSSHS, HCE, and NPEHLS. Responses to statement 27 (QPA should be based on credits earned) showed agreement from BSSHS and NPEHLS with disagreement from MSE and HCE. Responses to statement 31 (Criteria for grades should be determined by the individual faculty member and his/her standards) were in significantly more agreement from TS, BSSHS, MSE, and Carroll with HCE having the strongest level of disagreement. Responses to statement 32 (Faculty should determine grading criteria in consultation with others in that discipline) from TS, HCE, NPEHLS, and Carroll were predominantly in agreement. BSSHS exhibited most disagreement with statement 34 (Faculty should work with others in their discipline to ensure that grading standards are similar) in direct contrast to other divisions. Statement 36 (Students who do not take action officially to drop a course by a specified time and do not successfully complete course objectives should receive a permanent grade of failure) drew a strong level of agreement from MSE and NPEHLS with disagreement coming from HCE. Responses to statement 42 (Graded activities using multiple choice, short answer, and true/false formats provide for less subjectivity in grading and are more reflective of student knowledge) ranged from strong agreement for NPEHLS, disagreement from HCE, and a split decision from other units. Statement 44 (Nonpunitive grading encourages laxness in pursuit of grades of C or better) evoked the strongest level of agreement from MSE and NPEHLS. Statement 45 (Nonpunitive grading relieves the stigma of failure) had strong agreement only from NPEHLS while BSSHS showed strong disagreement. Others exhibited widely varying opinions.

Results were also examined to look for significant differences among teachers, SPS personnel, LMTC professionals, and other administrators. Some appeared. Statement 5 (A failing grade serves only as punishment) found strong disagreement with the

teaching faculty and LMTC people with SPS faculty split equally between agreement and disagreement. Of all groups teaching faculty most strongly agreed with statement 18 (Grades provide motivation for students) while SPS personnel disagreed as strongly with statement 22 (Grading throughout the course should be used to affect subsequent student performance in the course) as the teachers agreed with it. LMTC faculty agreed more strongly with statement 26 (QPA should be based on credits carried) while SPS disagreed. A higher percentage of teaching faculty disagreed with statement 28 (Major graded activities should be open-ended, e.g., essays, problem solving tests). Statement 36 (Students who do not take action officially to drop a course by the specified time and do not successfully complete course objectives should receive a permanent grade of failure) and statement 37 (Students who do not take action officially to drop a course by a specified time and do not successfully complete course objectives should receive a permanent grade of no credit) evoked extremes of opinion from all groups. Teaching faculty tended to agree more with statement 44 (Nonpunitive grading encourages laxness in pursuit of grades of C or better) while SPS professionals disagreed.

It is hoped that these results will focus the deliberations of the senate and the Instruction and Academic Standards Committee, provide support for the resultant philosophy for grading, and inform those voting as to the concerns and opinions of all.

GRADING QUESTIONNAIRE

	Strongly Agree/ Agree	No Opinion	Strongly-Disagree/ Disagree
1. Grading practices should reflect the student's skill attainment differentiating between levels of completence attained.	89%	10%	1%
2. Grading practices should reflect the student's knowledge attainment.	96%	1%	3%
3. Grades are a means of maintaining or enforcing standards.	79%	11%	11%
4. Grades destroy student motivation.	4%	7%	90%
5. A failing grade serves only as punishment.	9%	3%	87%
6. Any form of evaluation is by definition subjective and judgmental.	37%	8%	55%
7. Grades should be based on a standard established by the teacher and made known to the student in advance.	93%	3%	4%
8. Grading creates damaging anxiety.	13%	9%	78%
9. Grades mainly measure performance.	70%	10%	21%
10. Class attendance should count as part of a grading system.	56%	14%	30%
11. Student attitude and commitment to the class should directly affect the student's grade.	55%	13%	32%
12. Grades provide a reward system for the student who accomplishes the course objectives.	86%	9%	5%
13. Grades should reflect the student's motivation.	45%	20%	35%
14. Grades should be criterion referenced as opposed to norm referenced, i.e., based on established criteria rather than on how other students in the class perform.	83%	8%	9%

	Strongly Agree/ Agree	No Opinion	Strongly-Disagree/ Disagree
15. Grades should reflect the quality of work done by the student.	98%	1%	1%
16. Grades should reflect the level of responsibility accepted by the student for work required in the class.	79%	14%	8%
17. Course grades should be based on grades received for activities required by the teachers in the class during the semester.	91%	4%	5%
18. Grades provide motivation for students.	87%	10%	3%
19. Grades are the primary means of conveying information to the student about the student's work in a course.	60%	9%	31%
20. Grades are the primary means of conveying information to others about a student's work in a course.	72%	9%	19%
21. Success and failure are relative based on the student's frame of reference.	50%	27%	23%
22. Grading throughout the course should be used to affect subsequent student performance in the course.	56%	22%	22%
23. Grades reflect the student's skill/content mastery.	91%	4%	5%
24. Grades provide a measure of accountability for the student.	92%	7%	1%
25. Grades should be cumulative.	62%	29%	9%
26. QPA should be based on credits carried.	49%	22%	30%
27. QPA should be based on credits earned.	44%	19%	38%
28. Major graded activities should be open-ended, e.g., essays, problem solving tests.	36%	25%	39%
29. It is appropriate for course grades to reflect student progress rathar than skill level attained.	24%	20%	56%

	Strongly Agree/ Agree	No Opinion	Strongly-Diagree/ Diagree
30. Grading systems impact student motivation.	76%	17%	7%
31. Criteria for grades should be determined by the individual faculty member and his/her standards.	60%	10%	30%
32. Faculty should determine grading criteria in consultation with others in that discipline.	72%	8%	20%
33. Faculty should work with others in their discipline to ensure that expectations are comparable.	86%	6%	8%
34. Faculty should work with others in their discipline to ensure that gradomg standards are similar.	78%	8%	14%
35. Grading for each class should be curved.	7%	18%	75%
36. Students who do not take action officially to drop a course by a specified time and do not successfully complete course objectives should receive a permanent grade of failure.	53%	9%	38%
37. Students wo do not take action officially to drop a course by a specified time and do not successfully complete course objectives should receive a permanent grade of no credit.	36%	15%	49%
38. Once students attend one course period they should get a permanent grade (no drops, no withdrawals).	4%	10%	86%
39. Mid-term grades force teachers to start measuring student performance earlier than necessary.	18%	8%	75%
40. Mid-term grades provide needed information on progress to the student.	68%	6%	27%
41. Graded activities using open-ended formates (essays, problems, papers) attempt to measure higher level skills.	70%	17%	13%

	Strongly Agree/ Agree	No Opinion	Strongly- Disagree/ Disagree
42. Graded activities using multiple choise, short answer, and true/false formats provide for less subjectivity in grading and are more reflective of student knowledge.	37%	14%	49%
43. Grades given in courses taught by several faculty should periodically be reviewed for consistency.	74%	13%	13%
44. Nonpunitive prading encourages laxness in pursuit of grades of C or better.	47%	27%	25%
45. Nonpunitive grading relieves the stigma of failure.	32%	28%	40%
46. Nonpunitive grading encourages students to return and try again after a failing attempt.	34%	31%	35%
47. The College should not spend public resources to support students who demonstrate inability to complete college courses successfully.	48%	19%	33%

Office of Institutional Research
October 1989

CATONSVILLE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
GRADING QUESTIONNAIRE COMMENTS

Regarding #38, an F grade should be recorded, but the student would have the opportunity to retake the course.
I think a possible compromise for the grading system would be Pass/Fail designation with % achievements attached, eg., P (75% level attainment).

This college lacks standards, eventually it will lack students. This college is making the same mistakes CCB made in 1970, that is lower standards to increase enrollment. It doesn't work.

Until F's are instituted, QPA has no meaning.

I don't see what the non-teaching staff has to do with this study. This College belongs to a universe of Academic World in this respect and is too small to deviate from the Universal Norms in this respect. Therefore, for most part this study is irrelevant.

Grades should reflect the student's level of skill/accomplishment these factors are bound to affect that but should not be part of the grading per se.
Motivation depends on student.

The more grades the instructor collects, the more accurate the appraisal of the student.

Many of the items I evaluated seemed to depend on the individual student rather than on overall group - therefore my answers may vary depending on the circumstances.

I am not a teacher, however I think the number of graded activities should be more than 11. Immature and unmotivated students can be "assisted" in getting an education (which certainly should be CCC's goal) by faculty who care enough to regularly inquire (through tests, quizes, reports, etc.) as to that which each student is absorbing.

Grades do in a large part reflect motivation.
Many still think of X as failure.
Help them bring skill levels up to where they can.

We should use "F" grades rather an "X".

Sometimes unrealistic self-evaluation of own abilities and goals are based on hopes.
Definitely in pursuit of A's and B's. Why work when anyone can get a pass - fail. Non punitive grading discourages better students from making an effort.

Our college is the only one in the state which uses X's instead of F's, and whose QPA's are not reflective of failing grades - Our Transcripts are looked at dubiously by the V.A., employers and Transfer Colleges - I am very much of the opinion that the F grade should be reinstated. If the student wished to retake the course, they should be allowed to do so one time, and that grade substituted for the F.

I feel we should eliminate the X grade. For students that work hard and achieve only a C vs a student who gets an X than repeats and attains an B:

A student that repeats and repeats to get a C or better should have a new goal assessment. They should have their D's calculated in their QPA.

But the trying again is often unrealistic.
If "non-punative grading is used, QPA's should be done away with! Student who has failed 3 or 4 courses could have higher QPA than hard working successful C student!

Retain grades, A, B, C, D, X.

I'm very weary about our annual ambivalence related to the College's grading policy. I still support the "X" grade, but (perhaps) more controls are needed to avoid abuse of Our business.

There should be a limit on how many times a student is allowed to take each course.

There are 2 important aspects of grading

1. credit for the sake of the community
2. communicator of progress to student for their own personal development

You can't credential some one whose personal bent doesn't come up to credentially standards. Yet students shouldn't be discouraged from learning because the more they learn, the better off every one is if they don't matriculate. Grading should have no relationship to the ego problems of faculty for example - a teacher who is insulted because a student doesn't value their class.

Individual determines his own policy, but cooperation should result in similar standards.

What happens in class should be so vital that a student can't perform well unless there regularly.

BRING BACK F GRADE! _

Many questions would be answered differently if my perspective was not content-oriented coursework. I am training for EXP and expect to use different criteria (Progress, effort, etc.,). Also, my experience indicates that students motivated to use all the resources of the College usually are successful, so motivation will influence competency.

Students aren't dumb. They don't need to see an "F" in red letters to know they have failed.

The X grade at CCC is outdated and out of tune with most academic settings. I believe strongly that it encourages irresponsibility and mediocrity. The "rumor mill" in the high schools is that you can't fail at CCC. I believe it is dishonest in reporting grades to other institutions that do not reflect failure. I strongly recommend the return of the F grade and required class attendance.

Courses which are designed to impart specific knowledge and skills (as technical) must be graded to determine the student has has attained MINIMAL competency to assure, useful, reasonable, performance in the "real" world - not just their relative standing.

GRADING QUESTIONNAIRE

Course grading practices and philosophies vary among the faculty. In order to ascertain as objectively as possible what our faculty believe about grading their students, the Office of Institutional Research is conducting a study, the results of which will be sent to the Instruction and Academic Standards Committee of the College Senate to aid them in their deliberations on the College grading policy. Please give us your input for this effort by completing the following questionnaire.

Demographics

Please indicate to which group you belong:

_____Teaching Faculty
- _____Technical Studies
- _____Business, Social Sciences, Human Services
- _____Humanities, Communications, English
- _____Math, Science, Engineering
- _____Nursing, Physical Education, Health, Leisure Studies
- _____Carroll

Teach primarily
- _____Transfer/liberal arts courses
- _____Career/technical courses

_____Student Personnel Services

_____Library, Media, Telecommunications

_____Other administrative faculty

Status
- _____Full-time
- _____Part-time

_____Number of years teaching

Please respond to each of the following statements using a scale of agreement:

(1) Strongly agree
(2) Agree
(3) No opinion
(4) Disagree
(5) Strongly disagree

_____1. Grading practices should reflect the student's skill attainment differentiating between levels of competence attained.

_____2. Grading practices should reflect the student's knowledge attainment.

_____3. Grades are a means of maintaining or enforcing standards.

_____4. Grades destroy student motivation.

_____5. A failing grade serves only as punishment.

_____6. Any form of evaluation is by definition subjective and judgmental.

_____7. Grades should be based on a standard established by the teacher and made known to the student in advance.

_____8. Grading creates damaging anxiety.

_____9. Grades mainly measure performance.

_____10. Class attendance should count as part of a grading system.

_____11. Student attitude and commitment to the class should directly affect the student's grade.

_____12. Grades provide a reward system for the student who accomplishes the course objectives.

_____13. Grades should reflect the student's motivation.

_____14. Grades should be criterion referenced as opposed to norm referenced, i.e., based on established criteria rather than on how other students in the class perform.

_____15. Grades should reflect the quality of work done by the student.

Response Scale:
(1) Strongly agree
(2) Agree
(3) No opinion
(4) Disagree
(5) Strongly disagree

_____16. Grades should reflect the level of responsibility accepted by the student for work required in the class.

_____17. Course grades should be based on grades received for activities required by the teacher in the class during the semester.

_____18. Grades provide motivation for students.

_____19. Grades are the primary means of conveying information to the student about the student's work in a course.

_____20. Grades are the primary means of conveying information to others about a student's work in a course.

_____21. Success and failure are relative based on the student's frame of reference.

_____22. Grading throughout the course should be used to affect subsequent student performance in the course.

_____23. Grades reflect the student's skill/content mastery.

_____24. Grades provide a measure of accountability for the student.

_____25. Grades should be cumulative.

_____26. QPA should be based on credits carried.

_____27. QPA should be based on credits earned.

_____28. Major graded activities should be open-ended, e.g., essays, problem solving tests.

_____29. It is appropriate for course grades to reflect student progress rather than skill level attained.

_____30. Grading systems impact student motivation.

_____31. Criteria for grades should be determined by the individual faculty member and his/her standards.

_____32. Faculty should determine grading criteria in consultation with others in that discipline.

Response Scale:
(1) Strongly agree
(2) Agree
(3) No Opinion
(4) Disagree
(5) Strongly disagree

_____33. Faculty should work with others in their discipline to ensure that expectations are comparable.

_____34. Faculty should work with others in their discipline to ensure that grading standards are similar.

_____35. Grading for each class should be curved.

_____36. Students who do not take action officially to drop a course by a specified time and do not successfully complete course objectives should receive a permanent grade of failure.

_____37. Students who do not take action officially to drop a course by a specified time and do not successfully complete course objectives should receive a permanent grade of no credit.

_____38. Once students attend one course period they should get a permanent grade (no drops, no withdrawals).

_____39. Mid-term grades force teachers to start measuring student performance earlier than necessary.

_____40. Mid-term grades provide needed information on progress to the student.

_____41. Graded activities using open-ended formats (essays, problems, papers) attempt to measure higher level skills.

_____42. Graded activities using multiple choice, short answer, and true/false formats provide for less subjectivity in grading and are more reflective of student knowledge.

_____43. Grades given in courses taught by several faculty should periodically be reviewed for consistency.

_____44. Nonpunitive grading encourages laxness in pursuit of grades of C or better.

_____45. Nonpunitive grading relieves the stigma of failure.

_____46. Nonpunitive grading encourages students to return and try again after a failing attempt.

Response Scale:

(1) Strongly agree
(2) Agree
(3) No Opinion
(4) Disagree
(5) Strongly disagree

_____47. The College should not spend public resources to support students who demonstrate inability to complete college courses successfully.

If you teach, approximately how many graded activities go into the calculation of final course grades in your classes?

_____a. 1 - 5
_____b. 6 - 10
_____c. 11 or more

Comments:

Please return to Donna Linksz in the Office of Institutional Research.

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